

**TO: MAYOR KIRK CALDWELL
HONORABLE TON MENOR
MEMBERS OF THE HONOLULU CITY COUNCIL**

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FROM: KAREN WINSTON FOX

DATE: August 9, 2017

**RE: PROPOSED AMENDMENT OF ARTICLE 2 OF THE FIRE CODE OF
THE CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU AS PRESENTED BY MAYOR
KIRK CALDWELL ON JULY 17, 2017**

To The Honorable Mayor Kirk Caldwell, Presiding Officer Ron Menor and this distinguished Honolulu City Council.

I am Karen Winston Fox and I consider it a tremendous honor to stand before this body today to speak in support of the amendment to the Honolulu Fire Code as presented by Mayor Caldwell which would require that all residential high rises be retro fitted with life saving sprinkler systems.

As you all are acutely aware, Honolulu experienced a horrific five alarm fire which claimed the lives of three occupants at the Marco Polo condo. To many, those that perished were considered unfortunate victims of a tragic fire.

But for me, and hundreds of others, we lost so much more. On that day, there are many of us who lost a genuine friend, a crusader for the disenfranchised, the less fortunate; a manager who showed genuine concern and compassion for his employees. On that day we lost a true friend who made everyone with whom he came in contact feel as if they were the most important person in the world.

On the day of the deadly Marco Polo fire, our lives were changed forever. Our hearts were shattered, irreparably broken and torn apart. On that day, we were in shock to learn that we lost **Britt Reller**, his beautiful mother **Melba Jeannine Dilley**, Britt's neighbor **Joann M. Kuwata** and last, but certainly not least, Britt's furry, fluffy companion **Eddie**. The gaping black hole that remains in the backdrop of Honolulu's skyline is a daily and unavoidable reminder to Honolulu of that horrible July day when the unforgiving tragedy that was seen around the world.

I ask you to momentarily go back with me to that dreadful day. Go bck with me as you can recall your fellow citizen, the Rev. Phil Reller, as he rushed to the scene of the fire on 2333 Kapiolani Boulevard after having spoken to his brother Britt. Upon his arrival, Reverend Reller quickly realized the unimaginable-at the moment of his arrival he so brutally came to grips with the fact that the phone call that he had received just minutes before was the last time he would hear his baby brother's voice.

I want you to just visualize what it must have been like for Phil Reller to gaze into the sky and watch in horror as this savage, relentless, raging fire consumed the home of his family members. Imagine what Phil's gut wrenching thought process must have been as he stood helplessly and saw this fire snatch away two of the most important people in his life-his beloved mother and his little brother.

This fire was much more than a tragedy for the citizens of Honolulu. This inferno robbed three souls of their lives. Britt Reller, Melba Dilley and Joann Kuwata had plans for that Friday evening- plans that are now never to be. These three people had goals and ambitions that are now snuffed out. And it is all because of a homicidal fire that did not have to happen.

As I replay that day over and over in my head I can only imagine what Britt's last moments alive must have been like. What was he thinking as he desperately and frantically searched his smoke-filled home, trying to get to his mom. I shutter to reflect on his panic as he made that final call to his brother Phil, explaining that the home was filled with thickening smoke and he would not get to his mother to get her out of that fire. I can only imagine his desperation; his attempt to remain calm and stay low as his flight attendant training kicked in. I can only imagine those chaotic moments-moments where I am sure he wrestled his own rapidly approaching and impending death.

Your own Honolulu Fire Chief Manuel Neves has stated that a sprinkler system would have contained this deadly fire to its origin and these three lives would have been spared. Opponents of this amendment will argue that such an amendment is cost prohibitive and burdensome. I say to them, if you can put a man on the moon, you can figure out a way to prevent a repeat of that dreadful day.

Britt's loved ones and friends refer to an amendment to this Fire Code as Britt's Bill, Britt's Law-a law that was changed as a result of lives tragically lost; a law to prevent another deadly incident. Those three souls that perished that day are no longer here to advocate for change to prevent a similar tragedy. But those of us who remain would be remiss if we fail to speak up and speak out for life giving change, to sound the alarm, to speak in favor of an ordinance that will prevent another senseless and avoidable death.

As I take my seat, I remind this auspicious body to continue your legacy of protecting your precious citizens of Honolulu by passing this amendment. The power now rests with you.